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ABSTRACT

The arts, rather than being just a "frill," are essential to a public school curriculum, because music, painting, poetry, dance, drama, architecture, and the other arts are media of human communication, conceptualization, and innovation. This argument is developed through affirmative responses to five questions: (1) Should education provide the opportunity for students to develop their artistic and creative potential? (2) Should education provide an opportunity for students to study and interpret the literature, drama, music, dance, and visual arts of today's and of previous civilizations? (3) Should education provide the opportunity for all students to learn varied means of expression and communication in order to reinterpret the human condition for future generations? (4) Does education have the responsibility for developing all of an individual's mental resources so that he or she may be a fully functioning human being? (5) Does education have the responsibility for developing literacy in all of the arts and providing intense preparation in at least one of the arts? It is concluded that the arts have a central role to play in the development of educated human beings. (TE)

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As a former tenor-sax player in the Connecticut All-State Band of 1952, and as a former school superintendent in Boston, where music was first introduced into the public school curriculum around 1838, I am a product of, and share in the roots of, arts education in the curriculum.

But a question persists: In light of the American public's deep anxiety about student success in mathematics, science, reading, and writing, do the arts have a place in the school curriculum?

Supporters abound

Educational organization leaders, specialists, and philosophers have expressed their opinions about the place of arts in education. For instance, the Council for Basic Education supports the belief that the arts, along with math, reading, writing, science, literature, history, geography, government, and foreign language are basic because they generate all other learning.

The College Board has taken the firm position that all students should study the arts and that they should have intensive preparation in at least one area of the arts.

The Commission on Excellence in Education stated in its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, that "An overemphasis on technical and occupational skills will leave little time for studying the arts and humanities that so enrich daily life, help maintain civility, and develop a sense of community.... [The arts and humanities] must be harnessed to science and technology if the latter are to remain creative and humane. A school curriculum including little or no time for the arts is inadequate, whatever the level of student achievement in reading, mathematics, or science."

The National PTA board says that "Art is an important area of endeavor and should be studied for its own sake, just as history, science, and mathematics are studied. Art is basic to life. It helps us understand ourselves and others."

In fact, since Plato, virtually every individual or group that has made a contribution to Western education has included the arts as basic. Many people do understand the value of art in our society and the importance of art education in our schools. But many people in our society, including many educators, remain unconvinced.

Exposure is not education

The arts too often have been portrayed as "frills" to the "really important" elements of our society. In education, the arts too often have been portrayed as a frivolous diversion from the "serious" work of math, science, and language development.

"Exposing" people to art helps develop some understanding of art's importance. But exposure can go only so far. Do we ask our schools to "expose" children to math and science, or do we want students to understand the concepts and learn how to apply them? The converted understand the difference. What is necessary, however, is to convince the unconverted.

Develop an argument

To convince the unconverted, an argument needs to be developed for the arts as *essential*—not peripheral—to our society and to education. Elliot W. Eisner, professor of education and art at Stanford University, has pointed out that "humans experience and give expression to their most deeply held values, beliefs, and images through the arts, and there can be no adequate form of general education that does not include them." He says that students not educated in the arts are "semi-literate." I agree.

Examine school mission

The schools' primary mission is academic learning. And knowledge, understanding, judgment, and competence in the arts are fundamental components of academic learning.

Not only does man "not live by bread alone"—human beings do not communicate, understand, conceptualize, and innovate solely through math, science, and expository language. The arts are *ubiquitous* in human cultures because music, painting, poetry, dance, drama, architecture, and the other arts are media of human communication, comprehension, conceptualization, and innovation. They are equal in power to mathematics, the sciences, expository language, philosophy, and the other disciplines evolved in the course of mankind's long quest for usable knowledge, cultural understanding, and intellectual power.

Essentially, the "semi-literate" who is educated only in math, science, and expository language cannot participate fully in life and make the same contribution to society as someone whose education includes the arts. To the argument that the arts are not necessary to a "productive life," I answer that some people live what one might call "productive lives" knowing little or nothing about math, science, writing, or reading beyond a very low level. Indeed, many

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who cannot read or write manage to lead "productive lives." At the same time, the poorest of the poor and least literate of the illiterate often create and appreciate art.

Five questions

As this argument is refined to use with the unconverted, consider five related questions about schools' responsibility for educating young people.

Should education provide the opportunity for students to develop their artistic and creative potential?

Every human being has potential in the arts. To neglect the development of this potential would be to half-educate the individual. This certainly makes a case for beginning with a strong general arts program at the elementary school level to introduce all students to the basic languages of the arts and the joy of participating in the arts. If the opportunity to develop artistic talent is not available before adolescence, children are not likely to acquire basic literacy in using these tools to capture their ideas and feelings in artistic and creative ways.

Creativity is a quality on which Americans have prided themselves for more than 200 years. We count on creativity in technology and management, such as the recently announced breakthrough in superconductor technology, to provide the innovation that will help us overcome our international trade deficit.

The development of creative potential can be attributed to strong programs in the arts. Educational researchers have conducted studies which indicated that students involved in a broad fine arts program learned their other subjects better than students who were not similarly involved. They declared that studying the arts stimulates creativity and communication, which helps students to achieve in other subject areas.

Creative people are self-starters and innovators; they also are better at understanding systems such as language or mathematics, which makes it easier for them to learn reading and math than those who learn by rote. There also is ample evidence that contact with the arts was the basis for development of the creative capacities of some of the world's greatest scientists, mathematicians, inventors, and politicians. Albert Schweitzer, Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin, and Winston Churchill all are examples of outstanding achievers who developed creativity through the arts.

Should education provide an opportunity for students to study and interpret the literature, drama, music, dance, and visual arts of today's and of previous civilizations?

The arts have existed throughout the history of mankind and have played an important role in every civilization. Ernest Boyer, in *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*, states, "The arts are the means by which a civilization can be measured . . . . They are an essential part of the human experience. We recommend that all students study the arts. These skills are no longer just desirable. They are essential."

It would be difficult to imagine a curriculum in which students have no opportunity to see performances of the plays of Shakespeare, study the works of Picasso, hear the music of Mozart, or read the poems of Wordsworth, and to study other works of art. Such study must be considered basic to the understanding of civilization.

Furthermore, the arts help students understand people of other times and other cultures. They offer an exciting and stimulating way for students to perceive, on both a thinking and a feeling level, the fact that all human beings can have the same needs expressed in myriad forms.

Because we can appreciate the arts of different cultures, the arts serve as a bond to bring together peoples of different races, cultures, and languages all around the world. It is most interesting to note how often the arts are used in English as a Second Language classes to bridge both the language and the cultural gap, or to visit an international day program and observe students enjoying the art of many cultures.

Should education provide the opportunity for all students to learn varied means of expression and communication in order to reinterpret the human condition for future civilizations?

The arts can provide the means for communicating thoughts, emotions, and ideas that cannot otherwise be expressed. The arts also contribute significantly to each individual's search for identity, self-realization, and personal confidence.

An art work that is made or performed and shared with others is a source of joy for both the creator and the audience. Witness the light in childrens' eyes when completing their first painting, acting in their first school play, or playing their first successful piece on the trumpet.

Because each individual's work of art can emphasize the idealism, yearning, and aspirations of our times, to neglect providing the opportunity for this expression is a form of societal deprivation now and for the future.

Does education have the responsibility for developing all of an individual's mental resources so that he or she may be a fully functioning human being?

If the major role of education is the development of the individual's full potential, neither affective nor cognitive learning should be neglected. Individuals will develop whole and healthy only if the arts, which challenge a part of the brain not actively engaged by other studies, are included.

Some researchers go so far as to say that the absence of arts programs can retard brain development in children. It is certainly as important for students to have a deep sense of feeling as to exercise keen thinking.

In any case, an education and a life that ignore vast areas of expression, communication, conceptualization, and

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Arts education award

The National Schools Boards Association (NSBA) and The Kennedy Center/Alliance for Arts Education (AAE) have launched a joint annual award program to honor a local school board for outstanding support of the arts in education. The first of these annual awards will be presented during the NSBA convention in New Orleans, March 26-29, 1988.

Information on the criteria, nomination process, and application forms is available from NSBA's Office of Public Relations and Communications, 1680 Duke St., Alexandria, Va. 22314 (703/838-6722). In addition, this month's issue of *Administrative Angle*, which school administrators receive with their copy of *Updating*, contains more details. A copy of the application form and rules is included with this month's set of policy samples, which also is sent to school administrators.

innovation—the visual and aural areas—will surely hamstring our future communicators, conceptualizers, and innovators. Feeling and thinking, the worlds of language and mathematics and the worlds of sight and sound, cannot be separated in education or in life.

I know of no well-educated, successful person who does not combine these—in work and in life. Thus, education must give space—albeit in a crowded curriculum—to the arts, which connect thinking and feeling in the aural and visual worlds.

Does education have the responsibility for developing literacy in all of the arts and for providing intense preparation in at least one of the arts?

This is perhaps the greatest challenge of all. Serious arts education must be more than hearing a local poet read some of his works, visiting a nearby art museum, playing the sousaphone at the Friday night football game, performing in a student production once a year, or touring architectural landmarks.

No one would suggest that reading a few novels could fulfill the goals of language arts, or that playing video games could achieve computer literacy objectives. Therefore, arts education that leads to literacy in the arts must include a comprehensive, sequential program. This means studying, understanding, and using the language of art as it is realized in performance, creation, and analysis.

Another analogy will emphasize this point. Exposing large numbers of students to a symphony concert without preparing them for the experience with a comprehensive music curriculum, or taking them to a modern art museum with no comprehensive arts curriculum as a foundation, is comparable to taking people on tours of libraries to teach them how to read.

Treating the arts with the attention they deserve requires educators, board members, parents, and all concerned with education to examine the arts curriculum for needed integrity. As in mathematics, the arts student must learn the language of the subject; as in studying laboratory science, in which a student experiments with the tools of the science, the arts student must perform using the tools and materials of his or her discipline. And in the end, arts students, like students of other disciplines, must learn to analyze their own and others' works.

Renew commitment

The original question posed was: In light of the American public's deep anxiety concerning the need for public school students to succeed in mathematics, science, reading, and writing, do the arts have a place in the school curriculum?

The answer should be clear. The arts have a central role to play in the development of educated human beings, which is, after all, our business. As a superintendent, I would be highly remiss in my duty to provide the best education for each individual if I did not actively pursue all means to achieve a balanced curriculum that includes the arts.

But the converted know that there are many yet unconverted and that, when the course requirements increase or the budget declines, the arts are among the first things to suffer. If there are frills in the curriculum or among the priorities of government or civic organizations, the arts are not among them. The arts are basic and essential. The converted must join together to promote this belief.

As U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett wrote in *First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America*: "Music dance, painting, and theatre are keys that unlock profound human understanding and accomplishments. Children should be handed these keys at an early age."

The keepers of those keys, those who understand and believe in the value of the arts to basic education, must work together with renewed commitment and initiative to open wider the doors to literacy in the arts for all children and fellow citizens. ■

Assess your art program

The National Art Education Association has developed a checklist for school board members to use in assessing the quality of fine art education in their local schools. Many of the questions can apply to arts education programs other than fine art. These include:

- Do the written policies and goals of the district include the study of art?
- What was the status of art programs in state and regional accreditation reports?
- Is there a district-wide director or coordinator for the art program?
- Is there a written art curriculum, K-12, that includes art history, art criticism, studio practice, and aesthetics?
- Is art considered a basic subject?
- Is all regularly scheduled instruction in art conducted by certified art teachers?
- Is there ongoing staff development for art teachers?
- Are teachers involved in assessing and updating the art curriculum?
- Does the library have a collection of resources for students on art processes and techniques, history of art and artists, career information, etc.?
- Are there consummable supplies and specialized art equipment to support the program?
- Is there provision for field trips to museums, arts councils, or other places in the community for broadening the visual experience of students?

For a copy of the complete checklist, or of others addressed to such audiences as parents, principals, and the business community, contact: National Art Education Association, 1916 Association Drive, Reston, Va. 22091 (703/860-8000).